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ABSTRACT

This annotated booklist for parents and child caregivers is intended as a guide for using picture books to help children develop language skills. It differs from other lists which emphasize learning to listen; here the purpose is to facilitate talking. Each listed title is followed by a description of how the book might be used to teach a specific language structure (such as pronouns) or kind of vocabulary. Content of the entries, while seen as a matter of secondary importance, was judged to be of high quality. Entries marked with an asterisk are slightly more difficult and advanced than those not marked in this manner. (RH)

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picture books that teach language

an annotated booklist

Compiled and introduced by

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Introduction

This booklist was put together for parents and child workers who do not specialize in facilitating language development. It is intended to guide your use of picture books (those with very little text) to help your child or student develop language skills. It departs from other lists you may know, which emphasize learning to listen and to understand language; here the purpose is to facilitate talking. Each title is followed by a description of how the book might be used to teach a specific language structure (such as pronouns), or kind of vocabulary. Content is usually secondary but in all cases the books are of high quality in that respect also.

It is recommended that you choose several books with a similar purpose, and try them out. Respect the child's taste; reread and use for practice the books he enjoys most. As you reread to him, gradually increase the portion you expect him to say, always focusing on the words you want to teach. Any time you introduce a new book it is wise to reinforce understanding, too, by asking questions about the story as you read aloud.

*The books marked with an asterisk * alongside the title are slightly more difficult and advanced than the others. Browsing through books from both levels is the best way to insure that you are hitting the right level for your child.*

This is by no means a complete listing of books you might use to teach language. Don't be restricted by it, but rather see it as a starting place. All books listed should be available in your public library (if not, ask the librarian to purchase several).

You might notice the exclusion of alphabet, counting and word books. There are many fine ones, and the reason for omitting them is simple: you already know how these are to be used. Please remember, too, with regard to alphabet and number recognition, and counting, that these are only a small part of language learning, and not appropriate as a central focus for the child whose language is immature for his age, under age six.

As your child uses these, continue to dip into the somewhat longer, more advanced books, which will help him increase his understanding of language and prepare him for school.

.Alexander, Anne

ABC of Cars and Trucks

Shows twenty-six vehicles, one per page, with descriptions of their jobs. Good for the car-crazy child. Compare the different vehicles, using objectives, comparatives (bigger, noisier, heavy, etc.)

.Anonymous (illustrated by Aliki)

Hush Little Baby

A folk lullaby, illustrated verse by verse. Chain pattern, "if that ____, don't ____, Papa's gonna buy you a ____". Sing while turning the pages or simply read.

.Anonymous (illustrated by A & M Provenson)

The Mother Goose Book

There are many selections on the market. I single this one out for its variety and superior illustrations. Always go back to the child's favorites. Talk about the pictures, too.

.Barton, Byron

Building a Home

Superclear illustrations of every stage of building a house, each one accompanied by one sentence only. e.g., "A bulldozer digs a hole." Vary by changing verbs to past or future tense. (with the latter, ask before turning page "What will they do next?" and supply the answer in future tense.

.Behrens, June

*What is a Seal

The best book of double meaning words that I could find for beginners. (e.g. the two meanings of seal). Simple text, vivid pictures. Focuses attention on words sounds, as well as meanings.

.Berenstain, S. & J.

Bears in the Night

Uses short phrases, not always complete sentences, encouraging the young child to repeat. Funny story introduces position words: under, through, over, in a believable way.

.Berenstain, S. & J.

Big Hat, Little Hat

Many adjectives, all illustrated. No complete sentences. Some adjectives may need further defining. Encourage the child to help tell, once the book is familiar. Be selective - don't try to teach all the words.

.Berenstain, S. & J.

Inside Outside, Upside Down

Introduces position words in a funny, simple story.

.Brown, Margaret W.

Goodnight Moon

Short rhyming phrases. Objects are introduced, then mentioned again saying "goodnight" to each. For the very youngest listener. Point out changing position of the mouse in each picture.

.Brown, Margaret W.

Nibble Nibble

One of the best books of poetry for the youngest child. Still, be selective. Very musical use of language.

.Brown, Margaret W.

The Runaway Bunny

Sentence pattern: "If you verb, I will verb". The actions are linked. Helps teach the meaning of "if" phrases, and use of the future tense.

.Burningham, John

Seasons

Vivid illustrations, few words. Each season given several pages. Pattern: "spring is birds nesting, noun verb ". Modify all phrases to follow this pattern if you wish, as some pages don't.

.Cameron, Polly

*I Can't said the Ant

Teaches nouns, and idioms, delightfully. Many pages have series of short sentences with pattern: "Neat said the beet, dandy said the candy". Each thing is illustrated. Try leaving off the last word and see if the child can tell from the picture what is speaking.

.Chase, Catherine

The Mouse in My House

Many phrases are repeated. Encourage the child to help tell the story soon.

.Cohen, Mirian

Will I Have a Friend?

Use illustrations to get at how the hero might be feeling (lonesome, shy, etc.) and encourage discussion of why that might be. Supply "because..." sentences after asking "why" questions. Vivid portrayal of pre-schoolers day at school.

.Duczman, Linda

The Baby Sitter

Fine, simple photographs illustrate story with a relevant theme. Emphasize difference between what the hero thought might happen and what actually did.

. Eastman, P.D.

Are You My Mother?

Sentence patterns: "I am a _____, I'm not your mother, the____ wasn't his mother"...Vary the baby bird's question by putting it in the third person, (e.g. Is the dog his mother? No she's not.").

.Fitzhugh, Louise

I Am Five

Each page shows one action only, lending itself to modeling simple sentences. Encourage talk about the child's own likes and dislikes.

Flack, Marjorie

Ask Mr. Bear

Sentence patterns: "Can you give me something for my mother's birthday?" (asked of many animals), and "Is it a ____?" Other patterns can be added, as action is repetitious. Helps teach the meaning of guessing.

.Freeman, Don

Corduroy

No specific patterns (except "I've always wanted to have a, or see a ____") but the story has simple vivid actions that give opportunity to teach verbs in the past tense. For older children talk about Corduroy's seeing the escalator as a mountain, store as a palace, etc. How are they alike and not alike?

.Freeman, Don

Corduroy Gets a Pocket

Simple actions conducive to teaching verbs in the past tense. Modify, simplify the text as needed.

.Galdone, Paul

Henny Penny

Sentence patterns: These sentences repeat verbatim "Where are you going?" The sky is falling" - can help the child who omits is, are. Also repeats the complex sentence, "___and ___ went off to tell the King that the sky was falling."

.Galdone, Paul

The Little Red Hen

A good version of a classic tale. Add other negative sentences to the "not I" which is repeated, e.g. "he wouldn't, he didn't ___". Sentence patterns: "Who will help me..." "Not I" and others.

.Ginsberg, Mirra

Kittens One to Ten

A counting book with same actors (kittens) but different action on each page. Can be used just to get verb phrases (e.g. "they're climbing") or to count as well.

.Ginsberg, Mirra

Three Kittens

Illustrates the notion of "becoming" something: clean, dirty, black, white. You can also use "turning black" " getting wet. ". Transfer from past to present tense.

.Green, Marg M.

Is it Hard, Is it Easy?

Patterns: "is it hard, is it easy?" accompanying many actions which the child can also imitate. Talk about what the child can, can't do, wants to do.

.Hann, Jacquie

*Up Day, Down Day

Sentence patterns: Brief sentences in past tense, contrasting I and he as subjects (e.g. Jeremy caught a fish; I caught a cold). Good for teaching"I": you can stress it heavily when reading aloud. Subtle plot, theme being jealousy, makes it rather mature.

.Hoban, Russell

*Bedtime for Frances

Many actions recur with slight variations, so the child will hear repeated phrases. Simplify as needed. Talk about the child's similar experiences.

.Hoban, Tana

Dig-Drill, Dump-Fill

Photographs of work vehicles and machines on wheels. Urban scenes. Good for vocabulary, nouns and verbs. Provides precise glossary at the end of the book! Teach some of these words, experiment with sound effects.

.Hoban, Tana

Over Under and Through

Illustrates spatial and position concepts with interesting photographs. Model short phrases; "over the _____, through a _____.

.Hoban, Tana

Push-Pull, Empty Full

Photographs of opposing concepts, mostly adjectives. One word per page - the child can memorize whole book in two sittings and "read" it to you!

.Hoberman, Mary Ann

*Nuts to You, Nuts to Me

Poems, one for each letter of the alphabet. Pick and choose, as they vary in complexity (also see The Looking Book by same author).

.Hoberman, Mary Ann

*The Raucous Awk

Very musical poems, rhyme and rhythm are strong - about various animals. Pick and choose according to the child's interest. Favor the rhythmic ones.

.Holzenthaler, Jean

My Feet Do

Simple pictures, showing common actions which you can imitate. Great for new talkers learning verbs. (e.g. My feet can kick, I'm kicking, I kicked it").

.Holzenthaler, Jean

My Hands Can

Simple pictures, verbs for beginners. Elaborate on the text adding "I can" to the verbs, or putting in the past or future tense. Also vary the subject: e.g. "I build, he builds too."

.Hutchins, Pat

Rosie's Walk

Simple story, text, but the trick is to describe what mishaps befall the fox each step of the way. This is illustrated but not described with words in the book. Switch from past to present tense on separate readings- be consistent each time.

.Hutchins, Pat

Titch

Patterns: contrasting what the big siblings and little Titch have and don't have. Very few words. You can stress the pronouns by adding, e.g. "she has a big kite, but he doesn't." Also helps with negative, "doesn't, can't".

.Keats, Ezra

Peter's Chair

Aside from talking about how the older child feels about a new baby, use to stress possessive's: Peter's chair, the baby's bed, etc.

.Keats, Ezra

The Snowy Day

Very useful for teaching past tense of verbs: he walked, he made, he dreamed, it melted, etc. Instead of having the child say a long sentence you can ask, "What did he do then?" He can reply with two-three words, e.g. "he went home" or "he dreamed."

.Kessler, Leonard

Do You Have Any Carrots?

Sentence patterns: The title question recurs and is useful also shortened to "do you have some?" Other questions and modifications: Did he have any, does he like..., did they get any...".
Also teaches many animals and their foods.

.Krauss, Ruth

The Carrot Seed

Pattern: "I'm afraid it won't come up" - use with variations, "he thinks it won't come up", "he wonders if it will come up." Beyond the story, model similarly "she's afraid it won't taste good, I'm afraid I won't like it", etc.

.Kraus, Robert

Whose Mouse Are You?

Uses brief phrases to answer the questions "whose mouse are you?, what will you do?" Uses possessives too. You might go back and forth from answers to questions, which occur earlier.

.Low, Joseph

My Dog, Your Dog

Sentence patterns: sentences come in pairs, contrasting what the good and bad dogs do in the same situation. Use as written, or try linking the two sentences with and or but. (e.g. the good dog sleeps quietly, but the bad one barks at the moon).

.Mayer, Mercer

Frog, Where Are You?

A book without words Make up your own. Try a repeating pattern, such as "They looked for him in the _____ but he wasn't there", changing the location according to the picture. Pick out details and talk about them. Let the child retell the story his way.

.Mayer, Mercer

Just For You

Sentence pattern: "I wanted to ____ but _____" usually including adjective, such as "too slippery, too loud". Change the text so all sentences have "too adjective" if you wish. Talk about the baby aninal's accidents, and mother's accepting of them.

.McCloskey, Robert

Blueberries for Sal

The baby bear and Sal do nearly identical things, making this an easy, though longer story to follow. Use to contrast he and she (especially if the child uses her instead of she). e.g. He's eating all his berries, and she is too."

.Most, Bernard

*Turn Over

Funny guessing games, in which the answer is on the page you turn over. Sentence pattern: "Do you know why the ____ is ____ing?" Encourage guessing. The answers begin with "because...".

. Nakatani, Chiyoko

The Zoo in my Garden

Uses simple declarative sentences with is, e.g. "the pigeon is cooing, the dog is barking," which very few books do. Compare content with your own yard, e.g. "do we have a pigeon? who does?"

.Ness, Valere

*Amelia Mixed the Mustard

Rhyming poems. Be selective. Many have refrains (repeated last lines) which the child can join in saying.

.Provenson, Alice and Martin

The Year at Maple Hill Farm

Good for vocabulary building, as illustrations are full of actions. On some pages shows several animals in similar activities, giving a chance to describe what's the same and what's different. You can take only one or two pages at a time, if you wish. No story line, except for seasonal changes.

.Rey, Hans

Curious George

Full of actions, usually one per page, with lots of visual detail and humor. Tell the story in the present or the past tense.

Ricks, Charlotte H.

Look at Me

Sentence patterns: "I can ____" "Fine, but don't _____." You can create other patterns to follow the recurring theme of child's wanting attention and parent not giving it. Change or delete difficult phrases (rare). Very appealing pictures and theme.

.Rockwell, Anne

Thruway

Use to teach vocabulary connected with car travel, e.g. tollbooth, exit, drawbridge. Simple, clear pictures.

.Rockwell, Anne

Toolbox

Teach names of common tools, and action words, adjectives connected with their use.
See *Machines by same author, for similar material, though some pages are harder (e.g. pulley, gears, bearings).

.Rockwell, Harlow

My Doctor

Use to teach names of things found in the doctor's office. Also good for discussing visits to the doctor, being ill.

.Ruben, Patricia

*True or False

Unusual way to use text and picture combination. Each picture is accompanied by a statement which may be true or false (e.g. picture of a dog jumping, statement saying "A dog has wings and can fly. True or False?" Sharpens listening and concentration.

.Scott, Ann H.

Sam

Sentence patterns: with slight changes you can stress negative statements: e.g. "she didn't want him to play with her doll. Daddy didn't like what he was doing, no one wanted to play with Sam, Sam didn't feel happy..." etc. Have child help you tell the story.

.Sendak, Maurice

*Chicken Soup with Rice

Rhymes help child memorize the months of the year. Refrain (repeated lines) encourage the child to recite along with you.

.Dr. Seuss

The Ear Book

Focuses on different sounds in our daily lives. Use to teach adjectives, loud-soft, and noise words. drip-drip, toot-toot. The rhymes add to the fun.
See also The Foot Book by same author.

.Simon, Norma

I Know What I Like

Patterns: "I like..." "I don't like....", shows and describes several likes and one dislike for each verb (play, catch, smell). Encourage the child to talk about his own tastes.

.Simon, Norma

I Was So Mad!

Describes several believable things that make a child angry. Encourage the listener to add one or two of his own. Uses "when..." - sentences, e.g. "When you forget to kiss me good-night, I get mad."

.Simon, Norma

What Do I Say?

Presents common phrases and politeness words that are useful in real-life situations. For the very young. Fun for the child to answer "what do I say?" Also see What Do I Do?

.Slobodkin, Louis

One is Good but Two are Better

Simple rhymes, and situations. Describes activities in which sharing enhances the fun. Use also to ask child "what are they doing?"

.Spier, Peter

*Fast-Slow, High-Low

Introduces many things, adjectives in pairs. Use to teach comparatives - faster, slower, taller, etc.
Also see Crash Bang Boom for rich source of nouns and noise words.

.Stuart, R.

The Daddy Book

Introduces various professions. Use to teach verbs and nouns connected with these and all kinds of jobs.

.Udry, Janice M.

**A Tree is Nice*

Focuses on things that happen around and to a tree; shade, swinging, leaves falling, etc. Most sentences are simple, and provide good models for 4-5 year olds. A good example of maximizing information about one object.

.Weisman, Sam Q.

**An Apple to Eat or Cross the Street*

An imaginative look at ordinary and make-believe uses of common things. Talk about why an apple might do as a traffic light, and why not, etc. Rhymes.

.Wells, Rosemary

Noisy Nora

Brief, rhyming sentences, mostly with a pattern: "Father played with Kate." and refrain "Nora had to wait." Good presentation of a common problem.

.Wezel, Peter

The Good Bird

The best of the books without words. Help the child tell the story if he is at a loss. Help interpret the details, such as the fish's facial expression. Also see The Naughty Bird by same author - same idea.

.Zion, Gene

Harry the Dirty Dog

Stress simple action sentences (e.g. "he dug a hole," "he put the brush in it"). Good for teaching dirty-dirtier-dirtiest, cleaner, etc.).

.Zolotow, Charlotte

I Want to Be Little

Sentence patterns: "I want to _____ so I can _____. Grown-ups don't." You can add a verb to make "grown-ups don't cry", etc. Good introduction to complex sentences and for conversation about your own child's likes and dislikes.

Addenda

. Galdone, Paul

The Three Bears

Good version of this favorite. Use to teach contrasting adjective and past tense of verbs. Read with three voices for the bears.

. DuVoisin, Roger

Donkey Donkey

Emphasize "should" and "shouldn't" as well as positional words: sideways, down, and up. Talk about not liking something about oneself.

. Low, Joseph

There was a Wise Crow

Try even with beginners. Brief rhyming text, with three rhymes per sentence and all sentences of very similar complex structure.

. Steiner, Charlotte

Look What Tracy Found

One object, a stick, is used in many ways. Create a pattern, e.g. "She used it to _____."